

Child Injury Reduction: SafeSleep

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November, 2020

NMAIMH competencies addressed:

Theoretical Foundations

- Pregnancy & early parenthood
- Infant/very young child development & behavior
- Infant/very young child & family-centered practice

Working With Others

- Building & maintaining relationships

Direct Service Skills

- Observation & listening
- Screening & assessment
- Responding with empathy
- Advocacy
- Life skills
- Safety

Home Visitors play a critical role in the safety of children and child injury reduction. Within the current framework of the New Mexico Home Visiting Program's Logic Model, "Children and Families are safe" is highlighted (CYFD, 2016-2017). The New Mexico Home Visiting Program recognizes the importance of safety and the role that Home Visitor's around the state play in the safety of children and families. One vital area regarding the safety of children that we focus on is Safe Sleep.

What is SafeSleep?

The SafeSleep curriculum utilized within the New Mexico Home Visiting Program is a pathway to teach parents about safe sleeping practices to prevent Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), about risk factors for SIDS, and common myths about SIDS. This curriculum also helps parents learn safe sleep practices, and it also provides SafeSleep Cradles to families to encourage safe sleeping practices (CYFD, n.d.). This program emphasizes a clear message to parents of, "Alone, on my Back, in a safe Crib (ABC)". (CYFD, n.d.)

The New Mexico Department of Health, Maternal & Child Health Division, along with New Mexico Epidemiology Report provided these statistics in the March 24, 2017 journal issue regarding New Mexico Infant Mortality, 2009-2014 connected to Sudden Unexpected Infant Death Syndrome (SUID):

The Sudden Unexpected Infant Death (SUID – ICD-10R95, R99 and W75) rate in New Mexico (75.8 deaths per 100,000 live births) between 2009 and 2013 was significantly lower than that of the United States (89.4 deaths per 100,000 live births). However, Hispanics in NM had a significantly higher SUID rate of 79.2 deaths per 100,000 live births than Hispanics in the U.S. (51.2 deaths per 100,000 live births). Whereas New Mexico American Indians had a significantly lower SUID rate at 82.1 deaths per 100,000 live births than that of American Indians in the U.S. (216.7 deaths per 100,000 live births). There was no significant difference in the non-Hispanic White SUID rates for NM and the U.S. About one in three infants who died (34.4%) in New Mexico between 2009 and 2013 had a potentially preventable death. Of these potentially preventable deaths, two in five (38.2%) occurred to women following their first pregnancy. Non-Hispanic Whites in New Mexico (OR 0.67, 95% CI 0.46-0.97) had significantly lower odds of dying from a potentially preventable death than New Mexico Hispanics (reference) even after adjusting for maternal education, adequacy of prenatal care, birth order, infant’s gender, and the level of “urbanicity” of mother’s resident county (Kelley, Gary, 2017).

Based on this data, there are opportunities to lower the rate of SUID within New Mexico. Historically, New Mexico has lowered its overall infant mortality. It’s been in large part due to “the role of improved living standards, public health outreach, improved education about pregnancy and childbirth, and expanded medical services, including advancements in antibiotics (NMSHSAR, 2018)”. Preventative educational approaches that work with pregnant mothers and families of infants can significantly raise awareness and decrease the chance of SUID. There is an opportunity for Home Visitors to play that critical role in providing preventative education and awareness surrounding SUID and decrease the overall rate. The SafeSleep program provides a framework for communicating with families regarding this topic and the cradle provides a safe sleeping environment for infants. Beth Beers, from Presbyterian’s Socorro General First Born & More Program shares:

“SGH’s First Born Socorro & More appreciates the bassinets and associated safe sleep education as a way to reach out to families that we may not have been able to reach with the safe sleep message. It’s one thing to teach a person, but them to give them a vehicle to implement is great. We have recruited a few families through the program but the greatest reward is that families have the tools to implement. The state investing in this program is showing families that they are worth the expense! Not just a paper flier or a book that doesn’t have a lot of value. It also is a wonderful avenue to collaborate and make connections with others agencies within our community.”

Harm Reduction Approach

The SafeSleep program appears to run alongside some of the strategies of Harm Reduction by reducing negative effects. Harm Reduction is a Public Health philosophy and approach that has been successful in reducing morbidity and mortality (NHRC, n.d.). By respecting the rights and values of families we can partner with them to improve safe sleeping practices. The principles of Harm Reduction strategies rest on meeting people where they are at, as practiced by the New Mexico Home Visiting Program (NHRC, n.d.). Mary Gaul of the

North West New Mexico First Born program (NWNMFB) shared strategies about the use of the Harm Reduction approach and Cultural Sensitivity in incorporating the SafeSleep program with their Home Visits:

“In general we take a harm reduction approach. We definitely need to consider culture, but also need to consider resources. Many folks do not have the financial capacity to create a perfectly safe sleep environment...often sharing beds with babies and children. So we tend to start by offering small changes such as limiting number of blankets or pillows, reduce the number of people sleeping in one bed.”

Cultural Sensitivity

New Mexico has a rich and diverse culture. Being sensitive, respectful, and nonjudgmental to other ethnic cultures and the culture within families is integral to service provision within the New Mexico Home Visiting Program. Home Visitors traditionally work within homes and build close relationships with families and respect for the family’s culture plays a large role in our work. Naturally, there are cultural values and beliefs surrounding infant sleeping patterns/expectations, environments, and co-sleeping and that need to be considered when introducing the SafeSleep program. Some families may be particularly sensitive to the topic of safe sleep and Home Visitors must be mindful of cultural messaging and images when it comes to introducing SafeSleep. Strategies that may work with some families include a Harm Reduction approach, focusing on building the relationship with the family and then introducing, when appropriate, inviting families to group SafeSleep presentations with other parents to share ideas and thoughts. Through a focus on forming relationships with families we can learn more about their cultural beliefs, determine what risk factors may be present within the baby’s sleep environment, and provide education such as the SafeSleep program to support the family with making safer sleep choices.

Home Visitors in New Mexico are accustomed to families utilizing alternative sleep surfaces due to cultural customs or beliefs or based on what a family can afford. One of the safest alternatives is the use of the Native American cradleboard (NIH, 2010). The Healthy Native Babies Project (NIH) in 2010 gave this description of a cradleboard:

Although the specific design of a cradleboard differs from Tribe to Tribe, it is essentially a handmade, framed, flat basket where the baby spends much of his or her first year. The baby is placed on his or her back and swaddled into place in this safe and secure environment. Native teachings say that cradleboards keep the baby safe in a distinct location, help with the child’s skeletal development, strengthen neck muscles, and provide an opportunity for the infant to be visually and emotionally stimulated by his or her environment and family.

If families use alternative sleep surfaces, Home Visitors can work with families to determine risk factors and connect to resources if needed.

Strategies

There are many opportunities for creative strategies to teach families about safe sleeping practices. Through building strong, trusting relationships with families Home Visitors find opportunities to explore safe sleeping options with families. A focus on relationships is one

of the foundational tools Home Visitors use to create a safe and nonjudgmental environment that invites sharing from families. Creating these safe environments provides the groundwork for exploration and providing preventative education such as the SafeSleep curriculum. Utilization of reflective practice with families during exploration will help drive the discussion and development of goals surrounding safe sleeping practices. It's worth mentioning again that it may be helpful to look at increasing safe sleeping practices by utilizing of a Harm Reduction approach.

The National Institute for Health (NIH) has developed the Safe to Sleep Digital Tool Kit. This can be accessed by visiting: <https://safetosleep.nichd.nih.gov/resources/sids-awareness-toolkit> . Within this site you can access handouts, interactive tools, videos, media, Native American resources, resources in Spanish, and so much more. These resources may also be helpful when discussing this topic with families. These resources can be shared during individual home visits or in group learning sessions such as a SafeSleep presentation for new parents.

The transition of Home Visiting to New Mexico's Early Childhood Education & Care Department (ECECD) will bring New Mexico new opportunities to provide families support around safe sleeping practices. There will be opportunities to improve the current SafeSleep program to better meet the changing needs of families and Home Visiting programs. In addition to this, Home Visitors can access outside resources within local communities that may have additional programs and resources, such as local hospitals. Other resources available to Home Visitors can be provided by the Home Visiting Support Team which includes the ECECD Manager Monitors, Data Team, and Consultation Team.

Home Visiting in New Mexico plays a vital role in preventive approaches. SafeSleep can provide important preventative education that can save the lives of infants and babies. Home Visitors can impact infant morbidity and mortality in New Mexico related to SIDS by providing important information during home visits to families about safe sleeping practices

Reflective Questions

- How might you introduce SafeSleep to families?
- What are some ways you can honor and respect a family's beliefs on co-sleeping while providing preventive educational information and meeting the family where they are at?
- How might you adapt some resources to fit the individual needs of a family you work with?

References

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